

*Interviewer:* But I take it you didn't handle many cases dealing with relations between the coal operators and their employees, the miners --?

*Ira Hager:* Once in a while we'd have -- we'd bring suit, you know.

*Interviewer:* What kind of suit would it be?

*Ira Hager:* Well, the fellows would claim, you know that they didn't full pay them, you know. And I had one or two like that; I don't recall -- years ago \_\_\_\_\_ the bookkeeper would go to the office and they would adjust the matter if they made a mistake. You know, *[crosstalk]* make.

*Interviewer:* Right.

*Ira Hager:* Very few miners came to me about those cases.

*Interviewer:* Why was that?

*Ira Hager:* Well, I guess they didn't *[audio interference]*.

*Interviewer:* Can you tell me about how the courts worked, and the judges and all?

*Ira Hager:* Well we had pretty good judges but most of the judges were -- well, were -- we had good judges, yeah.

*Interviewer:* Do you know who appointed the judges? Was that the --?

*Ira Hager:* The judges were elected, you know. I could have been elected judge \_\_\_\_\_ in town but my brother -- see his picture there? He came out -- he was the one who run for prosecuting attorney. I defeated him in '24; I was elected, I think, but I didn't get the office.

*Interviewer:* Mm-hmm.

*Ira Hager:* They'd manipulate things -- indicted so many people. And then I guess they'd change ballots. They had a system of changing ballots, you know.

*Interviewer:* How did that work?

*Ira Hager:* To help the Democrats show their majorities, you know. And they run the county ever since 1824 when the county was formed. I

understood John L. Lewis said I paved the way for the union. I got these affidavits, you know, and I raised hell.

*Interviewer:* Well I'd really appreciate if you could tell me a little bit more about those affidavits: what kind of things you were suing against and how it works; did those affidavits help the union?

*Ira Hager:* Well, there was plenty of things in those days, including the affidavits, you know, that I wouldn't want to go back to [inaudible].

*Interviewer:* Well, I would really appreciate hearing about it. Not too much is going to shock me because I've heard a lot of this stuff and --

*Ira Hager:* [Laughs] Well, I know, but I have to go back on business once in a while.

*Interviewer:* Uh-huh.

*Ira Hager:* Every time that they run up our election that I ever heard of was in 1924. We have [inaudible] in the precincts. And they contested that election and we got in some votes and \_\_\_\_\_. I persuaded Dennis Hatfield to run for sheriff and he was a cousin to Norman Sayers, \_\_\_\_\_ on the Republican ticket. That split them up, you know, for one thing. And the Hatfields weren't afraid of anybody. They decided [inaudible].

*Interviewer:* Can you explain to me why it was that John L. Lewis said that you had paved the way for the union?

*Ira Hager:* I don't know. I just heard that he said that. But what I did, I had the authority to carry a pistol as a United States \_\_\_\_\_. I got my authority from the state, and they wouldn't let us speak in the schoolhouses. We had big crowds on the outside, the miners and wives, and I just laid my pistols out on the table and denounced them, you know. And I did that --

*Interviewer:* Denounced who?

*Ira Hager:* The mine guards. And I did it in order to get the miners to turn out and vote. Some of them were afraid to vote, the gangs, you know, so you'd beat them but they -- use them on a part of the ticket. I ran as prosecuting attorney; I always will be, but \_\_\_\_\_. Next time I run my brother I could have been judge. They wanted me to run for judge. I didn't want two Hagers on the ticket; I told him to go ahead and run, and I lost my opportunity to ever be judge.

*Interviewer:* Did the miners ever run their own candidates for public office?

*Ira Hager:* Well I think they did after I broke the ice, after we broke the ice – say "we" don't say "I." But the miners wouldn't stick together very good in politics.

*Interviewer:* Why do you suppose that was?

*Ira Hager:* I don't know. I don't know. And *[inaudible]* I never forget – I'm part Indian.

*Interviewer:* Oh yeah?

*Ira Hager:* *[Laughs]* Yeah. I tell you, I've seen men that were beat up come out and vote. Didn't see them vote, but I know they did.

*Interviewer:* I just find that hard to understand.

*Ira Hager:* I do too. I can't understand it.

*Interviewer:* You know, the only way I can explain it is just that they were so kind of like intimidated. I guess that must be it. Hmm.

Well it sounds like you did the miners a good turn.

*Ira Hager:* I broke the ice for them.

*Interviewer:* Can you tell me a little bit about how it was when they were finally able to organize into the union?

*Ira Hager:* Well they didn't have much trouble after 1924; they just come in and organize. They were so badly demoralized that they couldn't resist.

*Interviewer:* Who was badly demoralized?

*Ira Hager:* Deputy sheriffs and the sheriff.

*Interviewer:* But I take it they didn't really organize until 1933, when Franklin Roosevelt passed the National Recovery Act.

*Ira Hager:* Well he had something to do with it too. The fellow that we elected sheriff, Hatfield, he didn't want the union. I think they had some kind of agreement with corroborators too. Even my brother never did agree with me on anything. He said they would ruin this

coalfield if they come in here. I didn't have any influence with him after he was elected prosecuting attorney.

*Interviewer:* So he was pretty much against the union?

*Ira Hager:* He wasn't so very much against it but he just thought that it would ruin the coalfields, you know.

*Interviewer:* Do you know why he thought that, what his argument was?

*Ira Hager:* Well he had lived over here in Boone County and observed that they organized the Big Sandy River, you know. And then there was a fellow that *[inaudible]*, would spread propaganda around that \_\_\_\_\_ the operators \_\_\_\_\_ -- the United Mine Workers ruined the industry in Ohio.

*Interviewer:* Just by -- did he think that was because they had made wages so high that it would kind of like drive the people out of business?

*Ira Hager:* They strike too much, he said.

*Interviewer:* Oh, kind of interrupt production?

*Ira Hager:* Yeah, it interrupts -- is that somebody \_\_\_\_\_?

*Interviewer:* No, I don't think so.

*Ira Hager:* It's so hot I keep the door closed on account of --

*Interviewer:* When the sun comes in, huh?

*Ira Hager:* Yeah. \_\_\_\_\_ got the air conditioner on.

*Interviewer:* Well, those were real rough days, especially for the miners.

*Ira Hager:* Yeah. When's that marriage going to take place?

*Interviewer:* Whose marriage?

*Ira Hager:* *[Laughs]* Yours.

*Interviewer:* Mine? Oh, I'm not engaged.

*Ira Hager:* No?

*Interviewer:* No, I don't know.

*Ira Hager:* You [inaudible] yet?

*Interviewer:* Hmm?

*Ira Hager:* Is that thing --

*Interviewer:* This machine here?

*Ira Hager:* Yeah, that's recording?

*Interviewer:* Yeah, that's recording.

*Ira Hager:* Sure [crosstalk] --

*Interviewer:* I should turn it off.

*Ira Hager:* It recorded my question, then, didn't it?

*Interviewer:* [Laughs].

*Ira Hager:* I was just joking, you know.

*Interviewer:* Yeah, [laughs]. Yeah, well -- so you didn't -- did you hear any stories about what went on in that mine war, the armed march? I know you were away in Lincoln County but what sort of stories came back to you then?

*Ira Hager:* There's a man by the name of Green Ellis who was a deputy sheriff and he said he killed -- I think he said 16, 15 or 16. But I didn't know that there was that many killed. Might have been.

*Interviewer:* Is Green Ellis still living?

*Ira Hager:* No, he's dead.

*Interviewer:* Do you know if any men who actually fought in the battle that I could go talk to?

*Ira Hager:* I don't know of a living one of them.

*Interviewer:* Mm-hmm.

*Ira Hager:* I think they're all dead.

*Interviewer:* Do you want to tell me about – you said that in your book you were going to put in something about – like how those counties in southern West Virginia kind of went from being farming communities into going into the timber business and then later into mining. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

*Ira Hager:* A good many of the farmers, the boys with farms got attracted to the cities, you know, and there was not enough work in southern West Virginia, not enough industry. And when the cross ties were cut and *[inaudible]* lumber or went out in the river, you know, they had \_\_\_\_\_ drives, \_\_\_\_\_ Mud River and they – a man just went along with what they call cant hooks – I don't know whether you know what they were or not. They'd hook on a log and roll it, you know, cant hooks.

They drifted the logs out, and they went to – because many of the younger sets went out of southern West Virginia to get jobs. Some of them went to the coalfields, some of them went to Cleveland and some to Detroit, some to Philadelphia, some to Pittsburgh, some to Charleston. So there wasn't much industry but the coal industry, I'd say, from 1910 on, there's not much industry in southern West Virginia but the coal industry. In Huntington they had a few factories, glue factory and I think some kind of mechanical factory and *[inaudible]* the river traffic, and the railroads, B&O and the C&O.

I can remember seeing rafts running down the GuyanRiver. You know what a raft is?

*Interviewer:* Mm-hmm.

*Ira Hager:* It's logs pinned together, you know. Had a little steamboat there, \_\_\_\_\_ all the way from Diane down after Logan, and I'd run up and down the Ohio River \_\_\_\_\_. *[Inaudible]*.

*Interviewer:* Now I understand that when they opened up the Logan coalfield that they had to bring a lot of workers in because there weren't enough people in --

*Ira Hager:* Poles and Hungarians and --

*Interviewer:* Why was that? Didn't they have enough people in Logan?

*Ira Hager:* No, no, didn't have enough. They tried to wee out those that *[inaudible]* didn't have union experience, you know.

*Interviewer:* How did they find out whether they'd been in the union or not?

*Ira Hager:* Well they'd have spies and they'd listen to them talk. Even then the kids were spies. Like the South and the North in the Civil War, every man, woman and child and dog they said was a spy in the South. When they got up to Gettysburg [inaudible]. The Battle of Gettysburg, General Stewart – I been up to Gettysburg three times \_\_\_\_\_. Spent a week there once, with my uncle. He violated his orders and \_\_\_\_\_ killed certain cavalry and they didn't know what to do; they couldn't hear from him. He sent messages, one right after another, messengers to tell Lee he's engaged in fighting, and none of them got through; they were either killed or captured. So he sort of lost his equilibrium up there, you know. Now that's the way it is – there's \_\_\_\_\_ union coalfield, they retained \_\_\_\_\_ everybody that they can, \_\_\_\_\_ the ground, see what's going on. If a man comes on the job, gets to talking union, [inaudible] get him out of there. A good many miners were – worked for the sheriff, you know, [inaudible]. That's strange, you know? Public pay, you know. When they had the armed march a fellow just went into jail and shot a man \_\_\_\_\_ in jail.

*Interviewer:* Do you know anything more about that incident?

*Ira Hager:* Hmm?

*Interviewer:* Do you know anything more about it?

*Ira Hager:* No. I think the fellow was just drunk. He was – I think he was from New York State.

*Interviewer:* I guess human life was pretty expendable back then.

*Ira Hager:* Oh, it \_\_\_\_\_ -- yeah. I don't [inaudible].

*Interviewer:* Were many people brought to trial for murder? Or did most of the people, the killers, get away with it?

*Ira Hager:* They got away with it.

*Interviewer:* Did you ever prosecute any men who were – for killing?

*Ira Hager:* For killing anybody? I prosecuted one of them, Green Ellis.

*Interviewer:* This was the deputy who had killed this miner \_\_\_\_\_?

*Ira Hager:* No, it had nothing to do with the union business. I think something else was wrong with him. Simply was all for him, I know, he couldn't do any good. Prosecuting attorney [crosstalk] --

*Interviewer:* Do you know who it was he was accused of killing?

*Ira Hager:* No, I don't remember. I tried -- I expect I tried 50 murder cases and I can't recall any of the facts around them.

*Interviewer:* Sounds like he got enough practice killing up in the mountains, and wasn't too unusual for him.

*Ira Hager:* Well some of them were in Lincoln County too.

*Interviewer:* Mm-hmm. Right.

*Ira Hager:* When I was a boy it was a \_\_\_\_\_ thing, a man to get shot in Lincoln County.

*Interviewer:* For what kinds of things?

*Ira Hager:* Well, stealing or some kind of a dastardly mean trick and somebody'd shoot him, you know. Sometimes they'd just get in a round \_\_\_\_\_, business contract or something and -- sometimes feuds would start. Had the Spurlock feud and the Rumfields feud.

*Interviewer:* Can you tell me about those? I never heard about those.

*Ira Hager:* No, I can't tell you much about that.

*Interviewer:* Yeah?

*Ira Hager:* I was just a kid, you know.

*Interviewer:* Yeah? Of course the famous one is the Hatfield and McCoy feud, but I guess there were a lot of smaller ones too, huh?

*Ira Hager:* Oh yes, smaller ones. Just a lot of killing. I walked off before I was any part to it. My mother taught me that you didn't have to have a row or whatever, smart guy that tried to start a row with \_\_\_\_\_ -- she was going to go to Rustic to catch a train and her dog is some kind of barking at you, you wouldn't start an argument with a dog, you'd just put a muzzle on him. She said -- told me, she said, "Don't have a row, just -- if they jump on you then defend yourself, but don't have a row." She said [inaudible] nobody else \_\_\_\_\_. In other words, don't take them seriously.



I went over into Kentucky one time. I don't know if it was to examine a title or defend a fellow. And someone came around to me; he reminded me that *[audio interference]*. And he said, "What are you doing over here? What's your name? And what's your business over here?" asking questions like that. I got mad at once and this fellow \_\_\_\_\_ stomping foot, you know, he knew – he *[inaudible]* a damn fool, you know. He was afraid I didn't rile none. So that's an education like that why you don't have to resent anything. Like water on a duck's back, just like flow off, you know.

*Interviewer:* Did you know any miners personally? Like as your friend, as your personal friends?

*Ira Hager:* I kind of lost track since I quite practice, you know? Oh, I go back to Logan I know lots of them; they know me. I might not recognize some of them. After you're pretty close to 90 years old, you know, you're not like you used to be.

*Interviewer:* Gee, you don't look that old.

*Ira Hager:* I'll be 90 my next birthday. I didn't know I was so old myself. My mother, when the house burned I was away from home and she wrote down the age I was born: 1886. And I went to Washington – I worked in Washington, actually, after I was a boy, after I was – probably when I was about 18 I went there, got a job. And I had *[inaudible]*, came here *[inaudible]*. And finally I thought I'd check out the matter; I didn't want to argue with my mother: I was born 1883, March 1883. So that make me 89 years old now. I know I'm getting old because I feel it. My body's pretty strong but I'm dizzy, you know. Sometimes I sit down a while and start to get up and if I don't catch something I'll fall. And I had three canes since I been here and somebody brought every one of them.

*Interviewer:* Oh is that so?

*Ira Hager:* Yeah. Everybody pick up a cane if you see it, you know. I've got an extra one outside.

*Interviewer:* I could use one myself: I sprained my ankle.

*Ira Hager:* You did?

*Interviewer:* Yes. See, I got a bandage here *[inaudible]*.

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*Ira Hager:* Well hot water is the best thing for that.

*Interviewer:* Is that so?

*Ira Hager:* Just a hot towel, wrapped around your foot.

*Interviewer:* Does that help make it feel better, or help it get better?

*Ira Hager:* Well it takes the soreness out, you know.

*Interviewer:* Well I should try that because it's been hurting me.

*Ira Hager:* Try it for – try it often, you know, try it tonight and try it again in the morning and then try it about noon and then try it about suppertime. I expect you call that dinner. I was raised in the country, you know.

*Interviewer:* You call it supper?

*Ira Hager:* We call dinner supper.

*Interviewer:* Well I call it supper too.

*Ira Hager:* Well.

*Interviewer:* At least that's what my parents --

*Ira Hager:* That makes us relations.

*Interviewer:* That's right. What do you call the midday meal?

*Ira Hager:* Well I call it lunch when I'm in Charleston but when I'm out here I call it dinner.

*Interviewer:* *[Laughs]* Right.

*Ira Hager:* When I say dinner I mean dinner too.

*Interviewer:* Oh yeah?

*Ira Hager:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* You eat proper.

*Ira Hager:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Well I tell you what: did you want to go back --

*[End of Audio]*